

Seizures led to retirement and an identity crisis

Jack: My name is Jack. I was in the United States Marine Corps from 2006 to 2012. I served on the 11th MEU. Went to about six or seven countries around the world. I served in Afghanistan was my most recent deployment. I was an infantry officer. Most of my day-to-day job was obviously training Marines, managing expectations, setting up training plans, ultimately preparing them for a deployment. The first time I had a seizure was Thanksgiving 2010 and I had an absent seizure which is you basically you have no idea where you are, what you're doing, why you're there, who people are. Following that I had three or four different absent seizures like that and one where I kind of just dropped like a sack of potatoes in my kitchen. I couldn't deploy with folks, with my unit. I was medically retired and and kind of sent on my way.

I kind of felt like my identity was diminished and I didn't really know where to go. I tried a bunch of different jobs. I was a fit camp instructor, I was a real estate agent, I worked for a private developer, I mean, you just name it, I was trying these things. You kind of just start to change and you feel like you're unraveling actually. You feel like everything is just kind of falling apart. For me I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease after the Marine Corps and I thought that there was something going on, but my health just started dropping, it started going down, it just wasn't working out, which then put me into this downward spiral. I then felt anxious about what I could do. I felt like I wasn't as strong as I was before. The people that I wanted to ask were also the people that I was most unlikely to ask because it was like I was perhaps a mentor to them or they were a mentor to me.

I started dealing with this anxiety and pressure and all of a sudden I started going down and I felt like things were caving in and maybe I do have PTSD or maybe this is TBI and it manifested into this. It was like a hole, and I was just falling.

I knew I needed help, but I didn't know how to ask for help cause I never really felt comfortable doing it before. I was hitting a critical point to where I was hiding too much, something had to give. I said, "Just go out, do something, talk to people." And for me, I talked to my parents and that was hard to say the least, but like parents do and family and friends, they had incredible advice for me and it just relieved enough pressure for me to say, "Okay, it'll be alright. If I just keep doing that and I keep this one line of communication open with my parents, then I'll allow myself to open up to another line of communication.

I spoke with someone over at mental health. They didn't judge me, they didn't say, you know, "Oh my gosh," like, "you have PTSD, or you have this," they just talked to me and allowed me to talk too. I became vulnerable and for anybody that's never fun, but it was necessary. That was when all of a sudden I felt like, okay, I can not only do this, but I can do it well. I can get out of this, and I'll be better, I'll be stronger and I'll be more capable.

Once I talked to a couple dudes, a couple folks who had already been through it, then all of a sudden, I started to regain some control, and they were like, "Hey Jack, this isn't gonna happen overnight." It's where it is. Keeping that network active and reaching out is something that is so important, I really believe to the success of a transition. Manage expectations, use friends and their experiences. We're all around, use our experiences to give you some control.



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